IS HE THE OLDEST MAN?

Life Story of the Venerable Noah Raby, Aged 123 Years.

SIGHTLESS, BUT STURDY

A Sailor Before the War of 1812. He Saw Gen. Washington Angry. Has Taken His Whiskey and Tobacco Steadily for One Hundred and Eighteen Years.

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Is Noah Raby, of the Piscataway poor farm, the oldest man in the world? If his own story of his life, which he tells with an air of the most profound conviction, be true, he has passed his one hundred and twenty-third birthday, and no one living has knowledge of any facts to the contrary.

It was about eighty-three years ago, according to his recollection, that Noah Raby, ordinary seaman, received his discharge papers from the staunch frigate Brandywine, which had just finished a cruise of inspection of the various ports of the United States and was then docked at the Brooklyn navy yard. The day after he left the naval service he betook himself to New Jersey, where he joined himself to a farmer and for money agreed to serve as a hired man. Since that time he has never stepped outside the boundaries of New Jersey. For more than half a century, with more or less steadiness, he followed the occupation he had chosen, and then, twenty-eight years ago, being full of years and decidedly averse to earning his own living any longer, he settled down at the poor farm in the township of Piscataway, not far from New Brunswick, and there he has since remained.

To-day he is totally blind, but his eyes, though sunken, have the sparkle of one who can see perfectly. His body is bent and his shoulders are contracted, but the muscles of his arms and legs are firmer than those of many a man not yet thirty. His jaws are toothless and his words are uttered with a whistling accompaniment, but his voice is strong and full and his laugh is hearty as it was a century and more ago. His long hair is white, but thick and luxuriant, his whiskers are iron gray, his heavy, bushy eyebrows are still almost jet black, and he can dispose of a solid drink of good rye whisky with the sort of smack that betokens the heartiest relish. Though he believes his father to have been an Indian, his skin is white, and his features are of a pronounced Caucasian type.

When I told him a few days ago that I wished to write of his life for the newspapers, he gave evidence of the greatest delight, and when I added that I intended to have him photographed, so that all the world might see how the oldest man appears, he trembled with joy.

"Oh! mah gracious, suh," he cried, in an accent reminiscent both of the south and the sea, yet greatly influenced by his long sojourn in New Jersey. "Have the folks in the big cities heard of me? Oh, mah gracious! what a pity it is that I can't see no moh, so's I could read all about myself. Where was I born? In No'th Cahlinoh, suh, in Eatontown, Gates county, jess ovah th' Vaginny line, two or three years before the revolution. I can't remember it of course. Mah mother, she was a South Cahlinoh white woman, name Sarah Raby, and mah father was a No'th American Indian; yes, suh; yes, suh—a native of this country, name Andrew Bass. Mah father and mah mother never married, suh, and I didn't have a chance to get much learning. I never went to school at all, but I learned to read the Old Testament and the New Testament and the hymnbook and the newspapers. I never read the newspapers much, though. There ain't anything spiritual in 'em, suh! I never learned to write. I can't even write my own name.

"Well, my mother she' lived in a house made of pitch pine poles, notched at the ends and plastered with mud. She was pore and she wanted to get married and I had to go somewhere. So I was bound out when I was seven years old to an old white-headed farmer named Mills Field, and I stayed on his farm till I was twenty-one. Mr. Field agreed to give me one year's schooling, but he didn't do it—too stingy, maybe—but he was powerful fine man. He had a big farm just over the line in Virginia from Gates county, and he had lots of slaves. One of his slaves was the strongest man I ever saw; Mr. Mills was offered lots of money for Big Tom, but he wouldn't sell; he didn't believe in selling niggahs, suh, but he was willing to own 'em. Mr. Mills wasn't no professor of religion, suh, but he was a good man, and he always treated everyone around him right.

"I began to smoke, suh, when I was home with my mother, when I was about six years old. I used to light my mother's pipe for her—fill it with tobacco, you know, and put a coal on it and take a few whiffs. No, I don't 'ickollect that tobacco ever made me sick. I don't think it has ever hurt me, either, and I have smoked going on to one hundred and eighteen years now, suh—pipes, cigars and stogas, suh, but no cigarettes. Never, suh! I've drank whisky almost as long as I've smoked, suh, and just as steady. But I was never overcome by whisky, suh—what you might call drunk—but three times in my life.

"I was about sixteen or seventeen the first time—jess a boy. Well, there was going to be an eclipse, and some folks said the world was coming to an end. I was a poor, ignorant boy then, and I

NOAH RABY.

was powerful scared and I believed it enough the world would all burn up. I'd know better now, but then I made up my mind that if the end was a-coming I wouldn't know anything about it. Well, suh, young Mr. Mills and me and an old nigger went to town the day before the eclipse. The nigger stole a shilling and he asked me to buy him some whisky at the tavern, for nobody wouldn't dare sell no whisky to no nigger in them old days, and I got a big black bottle full. I took one big drink before I gave the bottle up and the nigger gave me two more—oh, my gracious, they were great big drinks!—and that settled me, suh. I was drunk on my own account then, and I had to git down in the bottom of the ox cart and lie there all the way home and young Mr. Mills, he had to drive the oxen home. Well, he hit the oxen once and me four times with his ox gad all the way home. Oh, I was fuddled, but I could feel them whacks on my ribs, suh, and between the whisky and the licking I didn't get out of my bed for most a week. I must have been about sixty or seventy years old when I got drunk next time. I was chopping wood up in Morris county, suh, up here in Jersey, and my boss give me too much rum and black pepper for the shakes. The last time was since I've been here. A young chap got me to go to New Brunswick with him and got me full, but he had the worst of it, for he had to bring me back to the poor farm pig-a-back, suh, through the mud and the snow. He dropped me a few times, suh, but I didn't mind that; I was too much fuddled." And the old man laughed till it seemed as if his toothless jaws never would close again.

"I never was much scared after that eclipse, when I got drunk the first time," the old man went on, "but once, and that was when I was a boy, too, a big black snake—a regular racer—chased me about half a mile. Oh, my gracious, suh, that was a big snake! I could see him rise right up every once in awhile when I would turn to look over my shoulder. Then he would hump himself to catch me, and then I could hear him go down on the ground, kerflop, like a big pole. Then he'd go siss-siss-siss—like that—and I thought I was a goner sure. But he didn't get me, thank the Lord. No, suh; not a bit of it. I've been free from all slavish fear for more than eighty years now—ever since I left the navy. I was never scared in New Jersey, but before that I used to give up most shameful, suh. I found out a good while before you were born, sonny, that nobody'll make no trouble for nobody that don't make no trouble for them, and I hain't made no trouble for nobody ever since. I never had no fights; I'd rather run than fight, any time, and I've always come out the better for it, too."

When Raby was twenty-one he got away from Mr. Mills Field's plantation as fast as he could, and started out to find employment.

"I didn't jess know where I was going, suh, but I thought I'd find some place where I could stay," the old man said, after he had explained his life philosophy. "Well, I walked along, and walked along till I come to the house of the Widow Penelope Parker. Oh, my gracious, suh, she was well off! She had a big farm and a couple hundred slaves, and she raised all kinds of crops, and there was tar kilns on her place that would make a thousand barrels of tar. Well, the widow saw me walking along the road and she came out, and she says:

"'Noah, how far are you going?'

"I said I was going till I found a place to work, and she says:

"'Well, I guess you've found it. I knew you when you was a baby.'

"Well, I hired out to the Widow Penelope, to be her overseer, for two hundred dollars a year. I stayed there most five years, and then I left to work for her daughter-in-law, Widow Sarah Parker. She was well-off, too, but not like the old widow. When the young widow wanted me to be her overseer the old widow offered me fifty dollars a year more to remain on her farm, but you see I thought maybe I could marry the young widow, if was smart, and then her plantation and the niggers and the big house and the tar kilns would be mine. Well, my plan would have worked, yes, suh, if I hadn't fallen in love. No, not with anybody else, but with the widow herself. I was all tangled up, heels over head in love with her. Why, the ground where she stood looked crooked, suh, and I got afraid of her. No, suh, I didn't have the brass to tell her I was in love with her, but if I hadn't been dead in love with her I could have told her, sure. Everybody on the place knew how I felt, and finally old Uncle Mingo, a nigger I thought a good deal of, he says to me:

"'Massa Noah, you go to missus and you tell the secret to her. You tell her you must have her. Tell her you love her with your whole heart, and if she says no, then I'll fix her. I'll charm her for you, and she'll have to marry you.'

"But I wouldn't marry her that way. If she didn't love me herself, I wouldn't have her charmed. Besides, I know now that old Uncle Mingo couldn't have done it. So I didn't open the secret to the mistress. Oh, my gracious, suh, she was a handsome woman. She was—just—a—beautiful! Her face was like a wax doll's face. Her cheeks was red like red apples. Her eyes sparkled like the sun was shining on them all the time. Her hair was jet black—black and fine. But I never told her till it was too late.

"Well, suh, I felt like I would die. I couldn't do any work, and one day my half brother, he saw me, and he asked me was I in love. For a joke, you know, he said it, and I surprised him when I said I was. Well, my half brother was in the navy, and he gave a great big laugh, and said:

"'If you're in a love scrape, Noah, there ain't but one thing to do, and that is to come with us and go on a cruise.'

"So I got right out, that very night, without settling up or saying anything to anybody. I shipped on the Constitution, and that broke me of being in

RABY TELLS HIS LIFE STORY.

love. Yes, I saw the young widow once more. I got leave of absence once, and went to the plantation to settle up, and she paid me off all right. Then she said:

"'Noah, why did you go away that way, and leave me, and never say anything about it?'

"Then I told her all about it; how I was in love with her, but didn't have the brass to tell her; and what do you suppose she said—'Faint heart never won fair lady!'

"Yes, suh; that's what she said, and by that I've always thought that if I had told her in time she'd a' had me. Why didn't I marry her then? Good enough reason—the man who was her overseer after me wanted to own her plantation, her niggers and her big house, and he asked her to marry him and she did, suh. Yes, suh! And they hadn't been married more than a week then, suh!

"Maybe, though, she wouldn't have had me if I'd asked her, and I'm glad I didn't. It would have been awful troublesome to have a wife all these years, especially when the civil war came along. Why, suh, I wouldn't have been in that civil war, suh, for all the world and all the women in it, no matter how much I was in love. But I never fell in love no more and I never married nobody, and I guess I've been more comfortable after all. Yes, suh; certain, suh."

Noah Raby seems to have been a fairly satisfactory seaman, but he was glad to leave the navy when his time was up, for a number of reasons.

"It was at Portsmouth and Norfolk, suh, that I shipped," the old man continued, "and I slipped on the Constitution—the Con-sti-tu-tion, suh. She was a great vessel, suh, but then she was old and used for a receiving ship. Well, I worked for a year on the Constitution, going up and down the ratlines to the 'top on the mast,' but no further. I never got to be anything more than an ordinary seaman. I didn't want to be an able seaman. I didn't want to go higher up the mast than the 'top.' That was as near heaven as I ever wanted to go till my time came. It's far enough to fall from the 'top,' let alone the 'crosstrees. Why, suh, if you fall from the 'crosstrees' you get the worst of it, certain, even if you fall in the water, and if you fall on the deck you're gone, suh—gone. After I'd been on the Constitution a year I went on the Brandywine on the inspection cruise. Do I remember the captain's name? You bet I do. It was Farragut. He was a fine, portly, good-looking man, suh, and another man of the same name was a big captain afterward. No, I was never flogged, but I've seen lots of others punished. Once I came near being, but it was just because I tried to get away when some one else was being punished. Which of the ports we visited did I like best? All of 'em, suh—all of 'em. I could have shore leave three times a week when we were in port, and we could always find ways of having good times—there was always bright eyes to shine on Jack Tar in them old days, suh—certain."

It was while he was at Norfolk and Portsmouth that Raby says he heard Gen. Washington make a speech. Raby is not certain what the general was talking about, but there is no doubt in the oldest man's mind that the father of his country was indignant and excited.

"Yes, suh," said Raby, "I saw the old general and I heard him talk. He was pretty mad, too—oh, my gracious, yes! I shall never forget one thing he said—it has stuck to me most a hundred years now:

"'Go right on, fellow-citizens, as you have been going on, and I assure you that we shall have the devil to pay in this republic and no pitch hot!'

"That's what the general said, suh, certain, and I heard him say it, and so did a great many other people, but I suppose they're all dead but me now.

"Once when I was in the Brooklyn navy yard, suh," continued the old man, "I got a shilling for being patriotic. It was before the second war with England, and a British officer and an American officer were talking together, and the Englishman said there were plenty of nations that could whip the United States. Well, suh, I thought them two generals would fight, suh, I did, indeed, and finally the American officer he turned quick and he said:

"'We'll see what a Yankee sailor will say to your talk, sir.'

"Then he asked me if I thought the United States could be licked, and I said that I didn't believe there was any nation in the world that could whip the republic. If they were all rolled into one they might, but no single one could do it, least of all, England.

"Well, suh, you ought to have seen that English officer go away mad, and how good our officer looked when he gave me the shilling.

"While I was in Brooklyn navy yard I got leave one day and went out to see a monstrous pretty burying ground—Greenwood, they call it now, I hear. A man who came to see me two or three years ago told me that they bury a lot of folks every day there now—that the bodies go to that burying ground just like an everlasting stream of water. Oh, my gracious! what big cities New York and Brooklyn must be if that's true.

"I left the navy because I was afraid there'd be a war and I didn't want to fight. Well, there was a war, but I didn't see no fighting, only on the sea, and then I was on land, and a good ways off. I've lost my discharge papers and I'm sorry. If I had 'em maybe I could get a pension, and anyway, I could prove my age by them."

Some forty or fifty years ago Noah Raby joined the Baptist church at Elizabeth, N. J., being immersed.

"I believe the Baptist church is all right," he said, "but I don't think that just because I'm a Baptist and have been immersed that I'm all hunkidory. You've got to have a change of heart to go to Heaven, and that's what I got down in old Virginia a good many years ago. I was taken sick and had to lie on my languishing bed, and one night I was happy in the spirit and I got up and went about the house singing and shouting hallelujah! Yes, suh, and I wish everybody could be as happy as I was then. I've had nothing to complain of all my life, though, sonny. Since I was in love with the Widow Sarah, I've never had much to trouble me. I'm a little man, but I've got monstrous nerves, suh, anyhow. I never tried to get much money, and I've never worked unless I had to, but I've had enough to eat and to wear and to drink and to smoke. I've had a good time, too, and everybody who knows me will say so. In politics I've been a good old dimocrat, but I don't vote nowadays. They won't let me because I can't pay poll tax. But I don't mind that. I'm sorry I never learned to write, but I couldn't see to write now if I'd learned."

"Come, Noah," said the poormaster at this point, "it's time to take your bitters."

And when the official put a tumbler of whisky and water to the blind old man's lips he drank off the draught with great gusto.

"A good many gallons of liquor have gone where that's gone, Mr. Hummer," said he, as he handed back the glass.

When Raby was at his best he weighed but one hundred and thirty pounds and was not much over five feet tall. He now weighs less than a hundred and is not more than four feet six.

DEXTER MARSHALL.

Early European Postal Events.

March 1, 1500, (O. S.) Francis de Taxis appointed "capitaine et maistre de nos postes" by Philip, regent of the Netherlands, at Ghent. It is a matter of record that the Taxis posts carried English mails from Calais to Vienna and Rome before 1500. January 18, 1504, (O. S.) Francis de Taxis instructed to establish regular posts between Brussels and the capitals of Germany, France and Spain, with pay at 12,000 livres per annum. In 1507, England had a "magister postarum," appointed by Henry VII. Possibly it was Sir Brian Tuke, who served until 1545. November 13, 1516, Charles V. concluded a contract with Francis and Baptist de Taxis requiring them, for eleven thousand gold ducats, to maintain posts between Brussels, the capitals of Germany, France, and Spain, and Naples. Every post office was to have two horses. The Brussels-Paris route was to be covered in thirty-six hours, Brussels-Burgos in seven days, and Brussels-Naples in fourteen days.—Postal Record.

Sound Argument.

Herdso—I am always in favor of the under dog.

Saidso—So am I; it tends to make the fight last longer.—N. Y. World.

The Way to Get Them.

Lives of wealthy men remind us,
As each day so swiftly flies,
That we cannot hope for riches,
If we fail to advertise.

—Detroit Free Press.

EXHORTIN' DOWN IN GEORGIA.

Colored Preacher's Description of the Trip to the Land of Promise.

Straying into a darky church in the "low country" of Georgia, says a writer in the New York Tribune, I happened upon a real "exhortin'," which is a very different affair from an everyday "meetin'." A toothless, white-haired old preacher had reached the red-hot stage of "his disco'se;" singing and swaying he was shouting out a protest against "de trials ob de present life, breddern," and picturing with lusty roars the contrasting joys "ob de life ebberlastin'." He used his text—which seemed to have nothing in common with his remarks—to fill up the waste places, ringing it in whenever he ended one thought and before he started on the devious paths of another. He seemed to use it on the same principle that a stuttering man swears or whistles, to launch himself successfully upon a sentence.

"An' blow ye de trumpet all aroun' about de camp! What is you niggahs good fo', anyhow, down in dis vale ob tears? Yo' ain't no 'count in de persidershun ob de white fo'ks, onless it's de votin' time in de city! An' breddern, takin' in de sistern, don' yo' know dat down on de yearth yo' ain't got no holt nowhar longside ob de white fo'ks? Yo' hyear a po' ole niggah now, an' yo' know hits de truf he's a tellin' yer, an' yo' jes' better done come dis day to the Lawd. When yo' go to make a little jaunt on de railroad train, yo' can't go in de white fo'ks' waitin'-room in de cyarshed, an' yo' can't go in de white fo'ks' cyar on de train, yo' done gotter go in de place fo' de black fo'ks. In de schools yo' can't run up agin dem white fo'ks, yo' mus' allers stay wid de cullud peoples—(an' a heap sight better comp'ny dey is, too!) Yo' can't eben go to de white fo'ks' chu'ch to hear de word ob de Lawd ob us all, onless yo' set in de spesheral seats fo' de cullud fo'ks"—(voice very loud and sing-song here) "but when we git a ready—for to lace up—dem a gol'en shoes—an' to tie on—dem er white wings—bress de Lawd!—an' to cross ober—dat ribber Jordan—an' go thu'—dem a pearly gates—into Cannan up there—we won't find no black fo'ks' waitin'-room! De gospel train'll take us right into de presence of the great waite frone. An' de black man shall be dere, and de yaller man shall be dere, an'—an' de red man an'—an' de blue man! An' blow ye de trumpet all aroun' about de camp!"

Cold Kills and Cold Cures.

In England severe cold generally kills a good many people; in certain parts of North America cold still more severe puts new life into them. It requires no argumentation to show that there must be a definite reason for this. The chief reason is that English cold is mostly damp, while in North America it is mostly dry. There is the greatest difference in the world between dry air and damp air. The former is usually air pure and simple, possessing a full quantity of oxygen, and often charged highly with ozone. The latter consists of air mixed with the vapor of water. When the former air, fully oxygenated, is breathed, it stimulates more powerfully than champagne. The latter, less oxygenated and charged with the vapor of water, not only does not stimulate, it depresses.

Dog Farming in China.

Dog farming is carried on extensively in China. There are thousands of large breeding establishments scattered over the northern districts of Manchuria and Mongolia, and no dog skins in the world can compare with those that come from these parts as regards either size, quality or length of hair.

A Trick on the Professor.

The story is told of the late Prof. Blackie that when he once put a card on the door of his lecture room, reading: "Prof. Blackie will meet his classes at one p. m." Some waggish student obliterated the "e" in "classes." Happening to pass that way the old professor saw the change. Stepping up to the door he obliterated the letter "l" and went grimly on his way without a word.

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